

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5337

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 9022

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LE, CASC (MORGAN, ERNEST R.)

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH PRIME MINISTER KARAME - REQUEST FOR AID

REF: BEIRUT 8928

1. I HAD ABOUT 20 MINUTES CONVERSATION THIS MORNING, JULY 15, WITH PRIMIN KARAME WHO SEEMED RELAXED AND IN GOOD FORM. I BEGAN BY EXPRESSING PRESIDENT'S AND SECRETARY'S APPRECIATION FOR HIS PERSONAL ACTION IN OBTAINING RELEASE OF COL MORGAN. I ASKED KARAME WHAT HAD BEEN THE MOST HELPFUL ELEMENTS IN HIS EFFORT TO OBTAIN MORGAN'S RELEASE. INTERESTINGLY ENOUGH, HE SAID IT WAS TWO MEN RESPONSIBLE TO GEORGE HABASH WHO ACTED AS GO-BETWEENS AND WHO SHOWED PERSONAL UNDERSTANDING AS TO THE NECESSITY TO OBTAIN MORGAN'S RELEASE. I DID NOT ASK THEIR NAMES BUT KARAME VOLUNTEERED WHAT HE CALLED THE "STRANGE SITUATION" THAT TO THIS DAY HE DID NOT KNOW PRECISELY WHOM THESE MEN WERE SPEAKING FOR, I.E., WHETHER THEY WERE SPEAKING DIRECTLY FOR JIBRIL OR FOR INTERMEDIARIES.

2. I ASKED PRMIN AS TO 'ARAFAT'S ROLE AND HE SAID HE WAS COOPERATIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE FROM THE VERY OUTSET OF THE PROBLEM. HE REFERRED IN THIS CONNECTION TO HIS PRESS STATEMENT IN WHICH HE HAD MENTIONED THE NECESSITY FOR PRESIDENT FORD'S UNDERSTANDING OF 'ARAFAT'S POSITION. I TOLD PRIMIN THAT WE HAD NOTED THIS AND HAD REPORTED HIS STATEMENT.

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3. PRIMIN THEN TURNED TO LEBANESE SITUATION AND THE

TREMENDOUS DIFFICULTIES WITH WHICH HIS GOVT IS FACED.
HE SAID HE HOPED THAT HE COULD COUNT ON OUR ASSISTANCE
AND I ASKED WHAT HE HAD IN MIND. HE CITED "TREMENDOUS" FINANCIAL
DIFFICULTIES. EVERYTHING THAT HAD TO BE DONE WAS REQUIRING
MONEY AND THE GOVERNMENT WAS IN A SERIOUS DEFICIT POSITION.
I TOLD PRIMIN THAT I WOULD ALWAYS FORWARD HIS REQUEST TO WASHINGTON
BUT THAT I WOULD BE LESS THAN FRANK IF I WERE TO HAVE HIM EXPECT
MUCH ASSISTANCE. THE LEBANON HAD NO NATIONAL DEBT AND ITS
PRIVATE SECTOR WAS BOOMING. PRIMIN RECOGNIZED THIS BUT SAID
THERE WERE NOT SUFFICIENT REVENUES TO DO THE NECESSARY. THE GOVERNME
NT,
HE CONTINUED, WAS NOT STRONG ENOUGH TO PASS NECESSARY TAX LEGISLATION

I COMMENTED THAT I HOPED THAT UNDER HIS STRONG LEADERSHIP THIS
UNFORTUNATE SITUATION COULD CHANGE. PRIMIN COMMENTED THAT HE HOPED
RECEIVE ASSISTANCE FROM WEALTHY ARAB FRIENDS. HE THEN INQUIRED
IF IT WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE FOR US TO ASSIST WITH FOOD FOR THE
STARVING LEBANESE. I ASKED THE PRIMIN RHETORICALLY HOW HE THOUGHT
I COULD JUSTIFY SUCH A REQUEST TO WASHINGTON WHEN WE WERE
FACED WITH SUCH TRAGEDIES AS BANGLADESH, THE DROUGHT-STRICKEN
AREAS IN AFRICA, ETC. KARAME AGREED THIS MIGHT BE DIFFICULT.

4. KARAME'S REQUESTS WERE NOT OFFICIAL IN ANY SENSE OF THE
WORD. I AM, HOWEVER, SUBMITTING THE FOREGOING AS A WARNING AS
TO WHAT WE MIGHT BE FACED WITH AND IN CASE THE DEPARTMENT HAS
ANY COMMENTS ON MY PERSONAL RESPONSES TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S
THOUGHTS.

GODLEY

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